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Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III)
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Habitat III Africa regional meeting

Note by the secretariat

The secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) hereby transmits the outcome document of the Habitat III Africa regional meeting, held in Abuja, from 24 to 26 February 2016.

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Habitat III Africa regional meeting

Africa's priorities for the New Urban Agenda

We, the representatives of national government, local and regional authorities, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies, professionals, academia, the private sector, civil society organizations, women, children and youth, participating in the Habitat III Africa regional meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, from 24 to 26 February 2016,

Guided by the African Union's Agenda 2063, as a strategic framework for ensuring inclusive socioeconomic transformation and, in this regard, recalling the importance it attaches to urbanization as a driver of structural transformation,

Expressing our profound gratitude and appreciation to the Government of Nigeria for convening and hosting this African regional preparatory meeting on the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III),

Conveying our appreciation to the people of Nigeria, in particular the residents of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, for the warm welcome and hospitality extended to the participants at this meeting,

Commending the Habitat III secretariat, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the Economic Commission for Africa for compiling the Habitat III Africa regional report presenting the implementation of the 1996 Habitat Agenda and current urban challenges,

Commending also the African Union for its efforts on facilitating an inclusive process towards the Habitat III conference to articulate Africa's vision for sustainable urban and human settlements development in the New Urban Agenda,

Recognizing the milestones of the Habitat I and Habitat II conferences, the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20 to 22 June 2012, entitled "The future we want", relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Governing Council of UN-Habitat, Assembly of the African Union decision 29 (II) on urbanization and the Dakar Declaration adopted on the occasion of the fifteenth summit of the International Organization of la Francophonie, in November 2014,

Recognizing also the World Urban Forum as the foremost global arena for interaction among policymakers, local government leaders, non-governmental stakeholders and expert practitioners in the field of human settlements, especially the ninth session of the Forum, to be held in 2018 in Kuala Lumpur, as the first session to have a thematic focus on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to be adopted at Habitat III,

Encouraging African national governments, local and regional authorities, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies, professionals, academia, the private sector, civil society organizations, women, children and youth to participate at the next Habitat III thematic meeting on informal settlements, to be held in Pretoria on 7 and 8 April 2016,

Welcoming the initiative of the President of Nigeria on the African regional urban agenda and the strengthening of the partnership programme under UN-Habitat, and invite African Heads of State and Government to join and support the initiative,

Looking forward to the celebration of the twenty-second session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in Marrakech, Morocco, in November 2016, as a significant step in linking the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to the framework of the climate change agreements, and welcome the initiative by the Government of Morocco to host an African ministerial forum, in May 2016 in Rabat, to advance the debate of city policies and sustainable development,

Taking into account the recent adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,

Acknowledging that the opportunities and challenges of urbanization and human settlements have increased in scope and complexity and thus has the need to harness the full potential of the existing institutional and policy frameworks as transformative instruments for economic growth and poverty reduction,

Mindful that sustainable urbanization for Africa encompasses a holistic and integrated concept of human settlements on a continuum that reinforces economic, social and environmental linkages across metropolises, cities and medium-sized towns to villages where most of the continent's population still reside, requiring a multisectoral approach that strengthens partnerships at all levels, including with non-State actors,

Aware of the emerging challenge of forced urbanization owing to, among others, conflicts, terrorism and natural disasters, which has forced populations to move en masse from rural areas to urban centres and vice versa, and across borders, stretching existing infrastructure and resulting in increased insecurity and poverty, which need to be addressed in a comprehensive manner,

Recommend the following actions:

1. Harness the potential of urbanization to accelerate structural transformation for inclusive and sustainable growth by:

(a) Allocating adequate financial resources to promote sustainable urbanization and human settlements development in order to drive structural transformation for the benefit of all citizens. This should include the promotion of land titling and registration and resource generation through land base revenue and land value capture;

(b) Promoting inclusive economic growth that translates to full employment and decent jobs, as well as improved living standards, for all;

(c) Enhancing connectivity between rural and urban areas to harness the full potential of urban rural linkages;

(d) Strengthening linkages between urbanization and structural change policies, including accelerated industrialization and agricultural modernization strategies for high productivity and value addition;

(e) Strengthening and creating systems of well-connected cities and human settlements at the national and regional levels as nodes of growth on the basis on their competitive advantages;

(f) Integrating urbanization into national development planning as a cross-cutting factor driving national growth and transformation;

(g) Prioritizing planning and investment for sustainable urban mobility systems that link people, places and economic opportunities;

2. Enhance people-centred urban and human settlements by:

(a) Ensuring access to affordable basic services, including clean water, sanitation, energy, health, education and sustainable transport, as well as employment by all citizens in order to realize their full potential, in particular young people, women and people in vulnerable groups;

(b) Strengthening institutions and spatial planning systems to foster urban safety and security and as a healthy environment and to promote inclusion through participatory approaches and consultative frameworks, with special attention given to conflict and post-conflict settlements planning;

(c) Ensuring access to sustainable, affordable and adequate housing and land, and promoting slum upgrading to ensure security of tenure and access to socioeconomic facilities, taking into account the diversity of contexts, the potential of informal economies and the rights of the inhabitants;

(d) Developing and implementing clean air policies to reduce health risks through regulatory and voluntary initiatives, working with multiple stakeholders;

(e) Developing a national system of connected cities and human settlements to enhance rural-urban linkages and to advance growth and transformation on the basis of their competitive advantages;

(f) Adopting integrated national urbanization policies in the context of national development planning to facilitate multisectoral coordination and collaboration and avoid sectoral silos;

(g) Focusing on pre-emptive, spatial and programmatic urban planning to harness the full potential of urbanization and avoid irreversible and unsustainable pathways;

(h) Accommodating cultural differences, promoting localized systems of sustainable urban development and paying increased attention to the preservation of cultural heritage;

3. Strengthen institutions and systems for promoting transformative change in human settlements, including by:

(a) Enhancing capacities for rural and urban planning, governance and management, underpinned by sound data collection and use;

(b) Promoting effective decentralized urban management by technically and financially empowering cities and local governments to deliver adequate shelter and sustainable human settlements;

(c) Facilitating the participation of urban dwellers in urban governance and management;

(d) Strengthening and harmonizing urban legislation and regulation to promote and facilitate planned urbanization;

4. Enhance the contribution of urban and human settlements development to continental integration by:

(a) Taking advantage of urban corridors at the regional level for related infrastructure and other initiatives, cross-regional interaction and movement of people;

(b) Orienting regional and interregional infrastructure, facilities and initiatives to promote cross-boundary interaction and leverage the assets of urban and human settlements;

(c) Enhancing the urban dimension of existing subregional initiatives and investments;

(d) Positioning urbanization and human settlements as a driver of competitiveness through specialization and connected urban systems, namely, infrastructure, the economy and institutions, at the regional level;

(e) Developing sustainable cities with improved urban systems for improved functionality and efficiency, including energy and resource efficiency and effective delivery of urban basic services and infrastructure;

5. Enhance environmental sustainability, resilience and effective responses to climate change in cities and human settlements by:

(a) Strengthening the capacities of local governments for strategic response to climate change adaptation and mitigation across the rural-urban continuum;

(b) Developing infrastructure that is resilient and that will reduce the impact of disasters, especially in slums and informal settlements, and building institutional capacities and mechanisms and disaster risk management and mitigation, including early warning systems and urban observatories;

(c) Promoting green building and infrastructure technologies and the application of designs that mitigate climate change and adapt to its impact, including the urban heat island effect;

(d) Fostering the utilization of sustainable renewable energy and natural resources and investment in low carbon production systems in urban centres;

(e) Promoting resource efficiency in cities to facilitate urban development in a manner that preserves rapidly diminishing natural resources and allow cities to better manage water, waste, food, land and energy;

(f) Developing systems for sustainable solid and liquid waste management, including promoting the principle of reducing, reusing and recycling resources;

6. Enhance efforts to advance a global partnership to facilitate the implementation of the new global urban and human settlements agenda by:

(a) Mobilizing financial resources from both State and non-State actors;

(b) Enhancing multi-stakeholder engagement, including the private sector, for the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda for cities and human settlements in Africa;

(c) Enhancing capacity-building, skills and technology transfer for sustainable urban and human settlements planning and management;

7. Strengthen UN-Habitat to make it politically visible, as the key player in mobilizing all relevant actors, State and non-State, in implementing the New Urban Agenda as the outcome of Habitat III and the urban and human settlements component of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and reiterate the importance of the Nairobi headquarters location of UN-Habitat by:

(a) Establishing universal membership at its Governing Council to give it more authority and legitimacy in decision-making;

(b) Ensuring additional, stable and predictable financial resources from both the regular and non-regular budget of the United Nations;

(c) Improving the ability of the organization to provide capacity-building to developing countries in the designing, planning, implementation and sustainable management of urban and other human settlements;

(d) Empowering UN-Habitat as the global anchor institution that mobilizes and leads all actors on the sustainable urbanization agenda and urban governance and that engages the United Nations system in the implementation of mandates on urbanization and human settlements.

In conclusion, we commit to promote the principles and the recommendations included in the present declaration for Habitat III, ensuring that this contributes to the upcoming third session of the Preparatory Committee for Habitat III, to be held in Surabaya, Indonesia, in July 2016, and to the formulation of the New Urban Agenda at Habitat III, to be held in Quito in October 2016.